

New record of the Gray-capped Cuckoo, *Coccyzus lansbergi* (Bonaparte, 1850) (Cuculiformes, Cuculidae), on the southwest coast of Panama

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Abstract

This note presents the first record of *Coccyzus lansbergi* (Bonaparte, 1850) for the southwest coast of Panama. This new record was made on July 11, 2018, in the rural community of Juan Hombrón, Coclé province, Panama. The species has been previously observed in eastern Panama, but this is the first record for the southwestern region of the country. Our record is at least 142 km southwest of its nearest reports in eastern Panama. Overall, this record indicates that the species is likely a vagrant from its known range, given that no other records have been documented south of Coclé, in Panama. In addition, the increasing number of records from eastern Panama over the last 30 years suggests a recent expansion in the northern range of the species.

Keywords

Cuclillo Cabecigrís, distribution, Neotropical birds, range expansion, vagrant.

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Introduction

The genus *Coccyzus* (Vieillot, 1816) comprises 13 species of American cuckoos (Chesser et al. 2019). Most members of Cuculidae build their own nests, but some cuckoo species are popular due to their so-called brood parasitism (Kim et al. 2017). Cuckoos are widely distributed but are concentrated in the tropics, where they occur in a variety of habitats, including forests, woodlands, or mangroves (Posso and Donatelli 2012). However, there is little information regarding their distribution range

and migratory patterns, because most species have yet to be studied.

The Gray-capped Cuckoo, *Coccyzus lansbergi* (Bonaparte, 1850), is considered a poorly known migrant cuckoo from South America (Payne and Kirwan 2020). Its natural habitat comprises deciduous tropical forests, dry forest, and dense thickets near bodies of water (Ridgely and Gwynne 1992; Erritzøe et al. 2012), where it is usually overlooked, due to its habit of skulking in dense

undergrowth (Ridgely and Gwynne 1992; Athanas and Greenfield 2016). This species presents a relatively broad distribution in northwestern South America, occurring locally in north Colombia, northwest Venezuela, west Ecuador, and northwest Peru (Núñez-Zapata et al. 2016; Avendaño et al. 2017; Vallely and Dyer 2018; Payne and Kirwan 2020). Other records indicate that the species has been observed as far as Netherlands Antilles and Galapagos (Erritzøe et al. 2012).

In Panama, a total of thirteen sightings of *C. lansbergi* have been reported over the last 30 years (Braun and Wolf 1987; eBird 2020; Payne and Kirwan 2020). However, these records are patchy and scattered in a few localities restricted to the eastern part of the country (Payne and Kirwan 2020). Thus, the distribution of *C. lansbergi* in the Isthmus of Panama is not well known. Moreover, the lack of museum specimens collected in Panama, and the fact that the species has not been listed in any of the recent ornithological surveys and biodiversity assessments in this region (Miller et al. 2011; Renjufo et al. 2017), has led most authors to consider this species as a vagrant (Braun and Wolf 1987; Payne and Kirwan 2020).

Here, we report the first record of *C. lansbergi* in the southwest coast of Panama. This record is based on a single specimen sighted and song recorded in the rural community of Juan Hombrón, Antón, Coclé Province, Panama.

Methods

The record reported here was made by one of the authors (KA) during a visit to her family's property in the rural community of Juan Hombrón, municipality of Antón, in the province of Coclé, located on the Pacific coast of Panama (Fig. 1). This locality is characterized by forest patches of fragmented landscapes, interspersed with grasslands used for cattle ranching and agriculture. Photographic and audio recordings were obtained as evidence for the record. The bird was identified based on Ridgely and Greenfield (1992), and Angehr and Dean (2010) field guides. Photographic and the audio recording were uploaded to the online digital Macaulay Library (ML; <http://www.macaulaylibrary.org>) via eBird website (<https://ebird.org/home>). We also compared the

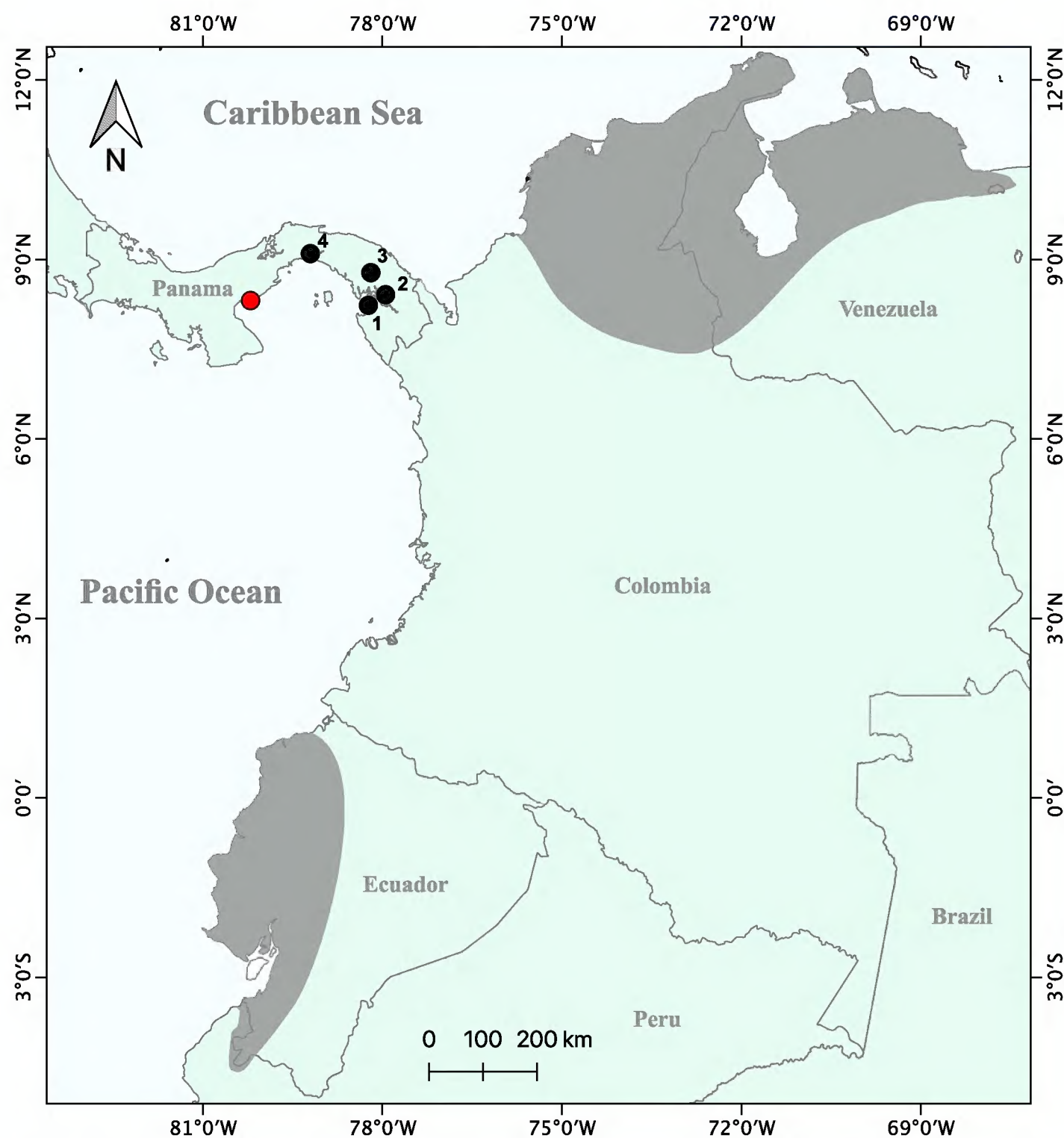


Figure 1. Historical sightings of the Gray-capped Cuckoo, *Coccyzus lansbergi*, in Panama. Black dots with numbers indicate localities of the sightings in western Panama: 1, Punta Patiño; 2, Aruza Arriba road; 3, Vista Alegre; 4, Finca Bayano (eBird 2020). The red dot shows the first documented (by photo and song) record of the species in the southwest coast of Panama. Dark gray areas represent the known distribution of the species in South America, modified from the Handbook of Birds of the World Alive (Payne and Kirwan 2020).

audio recording of its song with recordings published on Xeno-canto (<http://www.xeno-canto.org>) and Macaulay Library.

To create a geographic distribution map (Fig. 1), we used QGIS 3.12 (QGIS Development Team 2019) based on Panamanian occurrence records of *C. lansbergi* retrieved from Braun and Wolf (1987), Vallely and Dyer (2018), eBird (2020), and Macaulay Library. Finally, we drew the geographic range suggested by Payne and Kirwan (2020).

Results

New record. PANAMA • 1 adult; Coclé province, Antón District, Juan Hombrón; 08°19.32'N, 080°11.8'W; 11 m a.s.l.; 11 Jul. 2018; observed and recorded by Kayra Aguilar-Samaniego; Figures 2A–D; ML107294671, ML

107296091 and ML109061181. The bird was first observed perched on a small branch of a *Byrsonima crassifolia* (L.) Kunth tree, allowing it to be photographed and its song recorded (Figs 2A–D). When it perceived the presence of the observer, it moved to the crown of a *Melicococus bijugatus* Jacq. tree.

Identification. *Coccyzus lansbergi* was identified based on the characteristics of its plumage, with a dark gray cap, upper body with rich rufous brown, and deep rufous buff underparts (Figs 2A–D). The species was also characterized by its black bill, and medium-sized body (Angehr and Dean 2010; Schulenberg et al. 2010; Athanas and Greenfield 2016; Payne and Kirwan 2020).

These characteristics distinguish *C. lansbergi* from other species of cuckoos whose distributional ranges lie into this region, such as *Coccyzus minor* (Gmelin, 1788), *Piaya cayana* (Linnaeus, 1766), and *Tapera*



Figure 2. Photographs of *Coccyzus lansbergi* recorded in the southwest coast of Panama. **A–D.** Adult individual photographed at Juan Hombrón, province of Coclé, southwestern Panama.

naevia (Linnaeus, 1766). We also found that our audio recording of the bird’s song presented the same structure (a soft rolling series of hollow cooing notes, descending in pitch) of several *C. lansbergi* recordings from Venezuela (eBird: ML68684 from Zulia and ML68683 from Distrito Capital) and Ecuador (Xeno-Canto: XC274946 from El Oro, and XC257705 from Guayas).

Discussion

Coccyzus lansbergi is considered a rare migrant in South America (Ridgely and Gwynne 1992; Stotz et al. 1996), but its distribution remains poorly known (Payne and Kirwan 2020). In fact, *C. lansbergi* presents a dis-junct geographical distribution, occurring in Venezuela and Colombia and apparently breeding in Ecuador and Peru (Erritzøe et al. 2012; Payne and Kirwan 2020). The Gray-capped Cuckoo was previously known to occur in eastern Panama where it has been previously reported thirteen times (Table 1) (Braun and Wolf 1987; eBird 2020). The firsts sightings were reported during the 1980s, three times in Tocumen and one in Bayano (both sites located in eastern Panama province), and one time in Cana (located in the southeast Darien province) (Braun and Wolf 1987). During the last decade, new records of Gray-capped Cuckoo have been added to online data-bases such as eBird and Macaulay Library. These records indicate that the species was sighted six times in Bayano, eastern Panama province, and that individual sightings

were also reported in three different locations in the Darién province (Punta Patiño, Aruza Arriba, and Vista Alegre) (Table 1). Some of these recent sightings in eastern Panama are backed by photographic evidence, which eliminates the possibility of confusion with another species of cuckoo that inhabit that region (Angehr and Dean 2010). This number and frequency of sightings suggests that the presence of *C. lansbergi* in eastern Panama is recurrent. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that these records correspond to a resident population, rather than vagrant individuals as previously reported (Braun and Wolf 1987; Payne and Kirwan 2020).

Despite the increasing number of sightings in Panama, there is no published record of the Gray-capped Cuckoo from the western side of the country. In fact, the species has not been reported in any of the recent ornithological surveys and biodiversity assessments conducted in the country (Lasky and Keitt 2009; Miller et al. 2011; Renjifo et al. 2017). Moreover, our review of popular online databases (i.e., eBird and Macaulay Library) as well as ornithological museum collections (i.e., Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute Bird Collection) did not find specimens sighted in Coclé or collected in the country. Thus, our new record represents the most western sighting of *C. lansbergi* in Panama (about 142 km in a straight line from the nearest reports in eastern Panama) and extends the known range of the species in Central America.

It seems likely that this new record of *C. lansbergi* in Juan Hombrón represents an occasional vagrant

Table 1. Records of *C. lansbergi* in Panama. Dashes indicate lack of information; *N* = number of individuals; Doc = documentation refers to the number of photographs (P) or recordings (R); Digital data = photographs, sound recordings, and checklist.

Date	Locality (province)	Latitude	Longitude	<i>N</i>	Doc	Observer	Source	Digital data
10 Feb. 1980	Tocumen (Panamá)	—	—	1	—	V. Emanuel and M.J.B.	Braun and Wolf 1987	—
7 Jan. 1982	Tocumen (Panamá)	—	—	1	—	B. Whitney, J. Rowlett and B. Barth	Braun and Wolf 1987	—
30 Ja. 1985	Cana (Darién)	—	—	1	—	D.E.W. and others	Braun and Wolf 1987	—
23 Dec. 1985	Tocumen (Panamá)	—	—	1	—	L. O’Meallie and T. Meyer	Braun and Wolf 1987	—
4 Apr. 2010	Punta Patiño (Darién)	08°12’60.0”N	078°16’33.2”W	1	—	Tom O’Callahan	eBird 2020	S42037468
29 Jul. 2012	Vista Alegre (Darién)	08°47’14.1”N	078°06’34.0”W	1	—	Beny Wilson	eBird 2020	S19187794
12 Aug. 2015	Aruza Arriba (Darién)	08°25’05.5”N	077°56’21.2”W	3	2P	Domiciano Alveo	Macaulay Library	ML51808661, ML51808651
19 Aug. 2017	Finca Bayano (Panamá)	09°05’23.6”N	079°09’46.8”W	1	1P	Leslie Lieurance	Macaulay Library	ML66465881
19 Aug. 2017	Finca Bayano (Panamá)	09°05’23.7”N	079°09’46.9”W	1	—	Cynthia Lieurance	eBird 2020	S38720138
20 Aug. 2017	Finca Bayano (Panamá)	09°05’23.7”N	079°09’46.9”W	1	—	Jan Cubilla	eBird 2020	S38731420
21 Aug. 2017	Finca Bayano (Panamá)	09°05’23.6”N	079°09’46.8”W	1	3P	Euclides Campos	Macaulay Library	ML66653701, ML66653721, ML66653731
11 Jul. 2018	Juan Hombrón (Coclé)	08°19’19.2”N	080°11’48.1”W	1	2P, 1R	Kayra Aguilar S.	This work: Macaulay Library	ML107294671, ML107296091, ML109061181
19 Oct. 2019	Finca Bayano (Panamá)	09°05’23.6”N	079°09’46.8”W	1	1P	Luke Tiller	Macaulay Library	ML183029681
19 Oct. 2019	Finca Bayano (Panamá)	09°05’23.7”N	079°09’46.9”W	1	—	Steve Peck	eBird 2020	S62123811

(Ridgely and Gwynne 1992; Erritzøe et al. 2012), given that vagrancy is common in many migratory species (Ralph and Wolfe 2018; Howes et al. 2019). Nonetheless, it is also possible that the species is recurrent in eastern Panama, but it may have been overlooked, given its “timid” habits and the type of habitats it associates with. Specifically, this species is considered as a skulking and solitary bird, mainly associated with bushes, thickets, and dense shrubbery near water, undergrowth of moist to dry semi-deciduous forest and secondary woodland, which makes it difficult to observe and record (Erritzøe et al. 2012). For the same reason, its current distribution in South America is poorly known, and in many cases is restricted to a small number of points scattered across the several countries in which it has been recorded (Erritzøe et al. 2012; eBird 2020). It is also important to mention that the areas around Juan Hombrón remain scientifically underexplored, but we hope that the publication of this new record will encourage future research in this region. Our photographic and sound record demonstrate the contemporary occurrence of the Gray-capped Cuckoo on the southwest coast of Panama and provides the only evidence of its presence in Coclé province.

Taken together, all these records show a scarce, but regular presence of the Gray-capped Cuckoo in areas far north, suggesting that the range of the species may be extending north from its traditionally known distribution (Fig. 1). Although the reason for this recent range expansion is currently unknown, we speculate that anthropogenic disturbances such as land-cover changes and climate change are likely important factors to consider. Indeed, a growing number of studies have also associated range expansion in Neotropical birds with these factors in both lowland and montane species (Sandoval et al. 2017; Freeman et al. 2018). Thus, the detailed collection and publications of sighting records of the Gray-capped Cuckoo throughout the region will be crucial to test this possibility.

Overall, however, further research is needed to determine if this species is present in nearby localities, or between the new locality and the previously known occurrences. Therefore, reporting new locations, and reviewing the distribution of Neotropical birds will be important to clarify the species’ range and its conservation status.

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Authors’ Contributions

KA photographed and recorded the specimen. KA, LFD, and CA wrote the manuscript. CA produced the figures.

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